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THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

PHILOSOPHY IN DELIQUESCENCE

AT the meeting of the American Philosophical Association in December, 1918, anent the suggestion that the stricken and blinded world of civilized mankind stood in sore need of that clear-thinking leadership which it should be the business of philosophy to create—anent this a member raised his opposing voice to say that philosophers have their own problems, defined centuries ago, to which, now that the tumults of war were receding, it should be their privilege to return, immured and quiet. And strangely, this Hegel-in-Jena ideal of the philosopher's affair seemed met by no small sympathy. After all, we are men of the closet, or at best men of a coterie, the chorus seemed to say: what to us, who live *sub specie æternitatis*, are the turbulent issues of the hour, the tempestive life of contentious men? The excogitated tome, the fluent abracadabras, the few hierophantic gestures of the class-room—these are philosophy! . . . The dismal phase of it is that it looks as if this were indeed a prevailing conviction among the philosophasters here in the United States in these great years of world tribulation. Our whole programme seems insignificant, small, narrow, deadening.

I

This lugubrious judgment is called forth by a question put by an editor of this JOURNAL: "What is the matter with philosophy? . . . I have a strong impression that the problems that have been passing for philosophical ones are pretty well settled up, and that most teachers of the old things are not thinking of any new ones." Who can fail to concur? Despite a creditable amount of serious reflection and of clever expression, the recent trend of professional philosophy, certainly in America, has been obtusely unrelated to the moving interests of men. Political and economic issues, never huger than to-day, seem impotent to call from philosophers forceful thinking; literature is uninspired by any central philosophical conceptions, and suffers sadly from want of such inspiration; the appraisalment of science has degenerated into its empty adulation;

and even the refreshing of history, which is the great resource of sterile periods, is as yet represented by little outstanding scholarship (for H. O. Taylor's *The Medieval Mind* stands virtually alone as an historical work of the first order). Finally, in education itself . . . but here, perchance, is the crux.

For is not our defect primarily that we are professional pedagogues, with the cant and exercises of machine-made curricula for our guides? Probably schooling (teaching and learning alike) was never more monstrously mechanical than it is in the United States to-day, so that the very fortress of the free play of mind (and I mean philosophy) is tarred by the universal stick. The primary "matter" with it, is surely that it is regarded almost exclusively as a "subject" to be "taken" in courses, with doctorings, prescriptions, regulations, and completions. Philosophers are "professors," and philosophy is their administered sophistic—easily to be given to the unsophisticated youth, but leading to little more than a glib mannerliness of mind. It is, alas, too true that this is the case, not only with philosophy, but with many another college subject; and indeed, in consolation, I pride myself that it is less true of philosophy than of other college subjects—but the fact that the disease is here less ruinous does not make it benign. Truth is, the first step in the reform of philosophy (and of the other subjects) must be to reconceive it, not as a subject to be taught, but as matter worth learning. Let us quit writing text-books, and tell their publishers to go hang.

But this is a general indictment, with philosophy one of the least among offenders. A second, and related one, still in the pedagogic field, is the abdication by philosophers of their proper domain. In the last hundred years, or less, economics, politics, morals ("sociology"), psychology, pedagogy ("education")—all the "sciences of man"—have been, one by one, sheared away from their center, and indeed their sane anchorage, in philosophy. It is all well enough for us philosophers to survey them in their mutilated independence, every one made futile and empty by their off-shearing—to see economics and politics floundering after psychological sanity, to see psychology itself delivered over to superstitious fol-de-rol and public humbug, to see pedagogy setting up annually a new twaddle, outraging the King's English and ruining liberal education—it is all well enough to survey all this in the bitter consciousness that the emptiness and folly are the natural consequence of their abdication of the inheritance of Plato; but, for all that, we, too, have been the losers, grievous losers. What, indeed, is left to us save a few canted problems set in phrases whose mastery serves only to part us from our fellow-men? *Mea culpa!* I wrote a review of a good book and

sent it to a public journal, for the good of the public as I hoped, only to have it returned with the request to put the matter in language which *their* public could understand—it was “too philosophical.” *Too philosophical!* What, then, is philosophy? “I will speak of one man . . . that went about in King James his time . . . who called himself, The King’s Majesties most excellent Hocus Pocus, and used to say, ‘Hocus pocus, tontus talontus, vade celeriter jubeo,’ a dark composure of words, to blind the eyes of the beholders, to make his trick pass the more currently without discovery. . . .” Economics, and the rest of them, all need philosophy—desperately—but philosophy assuredly stands in no small need of the ancient interests, which in the Attic age gave her form and substance.

It was the job of Socrates to snare philosophy down from the supra-lunar solitudes and habituate her to the haunts of men. Ours is the apparently more difficult task of luring her forth from campus fences. Perhaps the first step should be a little more assertiveness within the fences, a demand that the whole body of the sciences of man be again related to their parent, not only officially, but also spiritually. This partly achieved, we may then go forth and attempt the greater coordination with the life and hopes of our time. Surely we should learn something from history; and where does history, the history of our own subject, show any profound development of human speculation save when it is movingly in contact with the whole world of affairs? The greatness of philosophy has been the greatness of its judgments upon man’s wide concerns; therein it has governed states and created literatures; its future shall be not less, but it is by no means assured that this future is to issue from its “professors” seated in their scholastic chairs. The topic chosen for the ensuing meeting of the Philosophical Association is methods of teaching philosophy. It is an excellent topic, and doubtless the first discussion should be, how shall we make philosophy worth pursuing.

II

Politics, science, art, religion, letters, and that human nature of which they are in some inevitable sense the expression, these are the cores of man’s speculative interests. Every one of them is touched upon, every one of them is thrown into luminous relief in those great dialogues which have made the name of Plato forever synonymous with philosophy, thereby showing to philosophy’s succession the full content of the philosophic sphere. It is true that they have a kind of metaphysical quintessence in the problems of knowledge, of being, of values, over which we men of the chair still mull; but it is also true that metaphysics, cut off from the imaginative, prae-

tical and physical embodiments of its thematic ideas, tends ever to pass over into empty mouthing, *flatus vocis*, words not meaningless but ritualistic—or, even more idly, into numbers and ghosts of numbers. The very nature of our treasure, which is tradition, in time clogs us with its own burdensome wealth, and philosophy, that she may breathe at all, must for a time move *terre-à-terre*. Socrates and Descartes alike should be our lesson as to this.

No doubt any one of us would like to be a Socrates or a Descartes if he but knew how to go about it. Obviously the thing is not to be done by a copying. And yet it is at least instructive that while Descartes is no copy of Socrates his virtual oracle was the same—*Know thyself* (and thereby know human nature) is the essential wisdom of each of them. May it not be that for us, men and Americans of the twentieth century, a better wisdom would emerge were we to turn our eyes more directly upon the American man of the twentieth century, and in particular to the American man of our several regional abodes, and from the life and aspirations of our own communities endeavor to find out that wisdom, that common-sense which Socrates and Descartes each persisted in attributing to his fellows—even if ironically? After all, man *is* the measure; and the particular man in his particular time; there is no philosophy without humanism; this is a homocentric world (and I take the *homo* in both Greek and Latin). For my own part, I can not conceive that the task of Columbus is more than begun; he touched the littorals of America, but the continent, as a maker of human life, is yet to discover; and its full discovery will never be until this life is thrown into a philosophic perspective. I know that some of my aggrieved brethern will interpolate—But *Pragmatism!* What is this but America *par excellence*? . . . Yes, it may be America; but is it philosophy? Our western farmers are said to grow corn in order to feed hogs in order to buy land, in order to grow corn in order to feed hogs in order to buy land, and so *ad infin.* This is good Americanism (acquisitiveness, activity); it looks like pragmatic truth, for it works for all concerned (the hog perhaps suffers illusion); but is there not, after all, a background of trust in the solar seasons at the one boundary and of human impulse at the other which calls for a more comprehensive theoretical frame? (Incidentally, I can not imagine this need to be quite met by our other American scholars who reduce the bucolic sequence to three moments of fact, “. . . corn . . . hog . . . land . . .,” held in adamant and mutual externality by the relate, “. . . in order to. . .”) Of course one never knows; it may be that the pragmatic merry-go-round is the soul of America; it may be that the realistic facts and relates are its triumphantly

dissected body; sometimes the case looks just so blank. But for myself, owning an irrational and I trust ineradicable love for my country, I am always in hopes of finding reasons that must justify this love—convert it into an entire confidence, and thereby into a philosophy.

My point is that back of this immense New World life, which Nature, God or the Devil has created, there must be, structuring or inspiring it, new ideas—ideas worth finding out and figuring forth. I confess that I don't know what they are; I concede that my reason for believing in them is but my patriotic prejudice; I own that I have no goods to show, and that what I am saying must seem idly senseless to most who read so far. But last evening I stood upon a blue mountain, and I looked down upon the many-mirrored plain reflecting the splendors of the descending sun, and I cried in my heart that the Lord must hold a glorious salvation for so beautiful a land!

III

As I recall the context of the editor's query, his anxious point was, What should be the programme of a journal of philosophy, of THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY, *etc.*, in this day and hour? (First, I should recommend dropping the *etc.*—the very title ruins a breath.) I hope, of course, that the implications from what I have said will give such answer as I can suggest. For what should be a journal of philosophy save, journally, a record of reflecting minds, and on all subjects which inspire reflection? Philosophizing is certainly not restricted to the solution of antinomies—nor even to all subjects under the heavens, for it alone may be supra-celestial. Why should we give over history, politics, art, letters, religion, if we remember the Greeks who fathered us? Some of these subjects, I own, may seem dead issues to the occupants of the seats of the mighty, but none of them *are* dead issues, and it might well be within the compass of its powers for the JOURNAL to find out those minds where the issues are living and expressive. Your editor is proverbially a prospector, and such a quaking as old Earth has suffered should have opened many a hidden vein. Besides, everything seems to need overhauling, ideas even more than the rest of the paraphernalia of civilization; it is our *métier*; let us to it.

If in the attempt we might be able to remember our good English past—what Hobbes and Locke did for plain English vocabulary, what Hume and Mill did for sane English style—if we might remember these and forget the locutions of the barbarians, perhaps philosophy might achieve once more its ancient power to inspire *belles-lettres*. Heaven knows it is difficult! My own rueful recol-

lection is of many a polite—"Ah, your *language* is truly sounding, but what does it mean?" We get it unwittingly and use it unconsciously, the whole sonant rote, but there is a possibility (I have believed myself to realize it now and then) of joyously discovering that we, too, are capable of discoursing in prose. Surely, it would be a fine thing if philosophy should, in the next decade, give such a tone to our letters as to lift our pleasant estheticisms into the realm of literature and cause literature to body forth an American imagination. And would it not be, also, the very bulwarking of our country's truer life?

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PRAGMATISM AS INTERACTIONISM

II

IN the former part of this article it has been pointed out that the most characteristic and most emphasized thesis of pragmatism, in the more recent utterances of its advocates, is the doctrine of the potency of "intelligence" to bring about modifications in the physical world; that Professor Dewey, Professor Bode, and others, are consequently in avowed and vigorous opposition to parallelism or epiphenomenalism in all its forms and disguises, and to the kindred assumption of the universal reducibility of bodily processes to mechanical laws; but that, at the same time, most pragmatists are altogether averse from any sort of psychophysical dualism. They seek to combine in a single doctrine the assertion of the efficacy of thought with the denial of the existence of any distinctively "psychical" or "subjective" elements in experience. We are now to inquire whether both these views can consistently be held by the same philosopher, without a falsification of the facts of those "concrete practical situations" which it is peculiarly the concern of the pragmatist to observe and describe truly.

It is to be noted at once that such a combination satisfies but poorly the pragmatist's antipathy to dualism as such, and hardly accords with his attachment to the principle of "biological continuity." A dualism of types of causal process, of laws of action, means just as deep a "cleavage in the nature of things" as a dualism of modes of existence; to a pragmatist, indeed, it should seem much the more significant cleavage of the two. If the appearance of "intelligence" upon the cosmic scene means, as Professor Bode says, the "advent of a new category"; if bodies, under the influence of in-